

## **APPENDIX E**

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING A SUCCESSFUL CDBG APPLICATION**

1. **Work to thoroughly understand the CDBG requirements, the five CDBG ranking criteria and each of the application ranking questions. CALL CDBG FOR ASSISTANCE WHENEVER YOU NEED CLARIFICATION.** Montana's CDBG Application Guidelines try to explain the basic requirements of the CDBG program in Chapters II- V and in the five ranking criteria in Chapter V.
2. **If you have any questions about anything unclear to you -- call the Department of Commerce CDBG staff as soon as you have questions. Also see Appendix P** – for lists of resources, national and Montana-based that can be of assistance in preparing your application.
3. **Thoroughly respond to each of the applicable ranking questions listed and also to all requirements listed under each of the five ranking criteria and in Chapters II through V.** Each of the individual questions listed for the five ranking criteria (as described in Chapter V of the *CDBG Housing Application Guidelines*) must be addressed -- they are precisely the ones the MDOC application ranking teams will be using to score your application. Make sure you present all the evidence that supports each of your claims.
4. **Approach the Application Guidelines methodically, step-by-step.** Use the Application Guidelines like a checklist. Be sure to address all parts of each of ranking criterion – i.e., address each of the requirements and application ranking questions and issues listed in the Application Guidelines. If you think a requirement or application ranking question or issue may not apply to your project, but are not sure if it is really “not applicable”-- contact CDBG staff to request a clarification.
5. **Be complete. Present all of the relevant evidence. Answer all of the questions and all parts of each question. Tell the whole story. To sell your project, you must "make your case."** Don't assume that the people who will review your application know your community or your situation. Present all the relevant evidence that supports each of your claims. The ranking team will be composed of Department of Commerce staff that may not be familiar with your community or the details of your situation. Describe the details and circumstances and evidence for the case you are making clearly and thoroughly. Your application must speak for itself, so include all the narrative and evidence you need to make a strong case for your project. Anticipate all the likely questions that might be asked and address each of them so that you make your case as strong as possible. You can accomplish this while still providing a simple and straightforward narrative that avoids unnecessary repetition.

6. **Form a Steering Committee or Task Force. Set up a calendar for completion.** Preparation of a competitive CDBG application is not a one-person job but requires the work of a team whose members are all familiar with the CDBG application guidelines and ranking questions. After you have determined which requirements will apply, break the tasks into individual assignments. Put together a calendar to make sure you have the time to get all the required tasks done, and schedule completion dates for each task.
7. **If your community was an unsuccessful applicant previously, make arrangements with Department of Commerce CDBG staff to review the ranking comments concerning your previous application. Find out what areas needed to be improved and be sure to address each of them.** What were the differences in the successful applications that caused them to be ranked higher? You can borrow copies of successful applications for similar projects to get ideas on how to prepare a stronger application. Even if your application received a maximum score on a particular ranking criterion, review your response to see if it can be strengthened further. The funds available are limited and the review process can only select a small number of grantees. See **Appendix P** – for lists of resources, national and Montana-based that can be of assistance in preparing your application.
8. **Take a holistic, coordinated approach to describing your project.** Several of the CDBG ranking criteria consider interrelated issues. The strongest applications often approach each of the 5 ranking criteria as components of a coordinated, overall strategy rather than as separate and distinct responses to stand-alone issues. Keep all the ranking criteria in mind at each stage in preparing the overall application narrative. A key concept (such as your community's long-term approach to planning and managing housing problems and issues using your Housing Plan), can be integrated throughout the application.
9. **Be concise and well organized.** Answer all of the specific questions listed. Follow the required application format presented in *Appendix D* (Section B). Use the checklists that are provided – the General Requirements checklist (*Appendix F*) and the Special Requirements checklist (*Appendix G*). But remember that excessively lengthy and unorganized applications can hurt because it is more difficult for the reviewers to follow the key points you are trying to make if they are buried in a lot of paper. Make sure that any exhibits or appendices you include really support your proposal and present evidence that is relevant to the support of your claims. **A succinct, well organized application with a logical progression of ideas and clearly labeled, easy-to-locate exhibits with good and relevant evidence makes it easier to understand the case that you are making for your project.**
10. **Arrange for impartial local reviews of your draft application.** A preliminary draft of the application should be reviewed by others at the local level (not CDBG staff) who are not closely involved with the application and who have looked at and are familiar with the CDBG Application Guidelines. They can serve as your editors – they can raise questions or spot gaps or inconsistencies in your arguments and notice missing or weak evidence that you may not be able to see because you are too close

to the project to be aware of them. Getting others involved can bring in a fresh perspective that may question some of your assumptions or see weaknesses that you cannot. Have your reviewers check both your early draft and your final draft against the CDBG Application Guidelines and against the checklists in *Appendix F* and *Appendix G*. Make sure that all your attachments (exhibits, appendices) are included before you send it to CDBG. See **Appendix P** – for lists of resources, national and Montana-based that can be of assistance in preparing your application.

11. **Give evidence that document knowledgeable, broad community support for your specific project.** The CDBG program encourages public involvement in the preparation of and implementation of local CDBG projects. The support of residents and others in the community is critical to your grant application and also to your project's success. Strengthen your application by including support letters that show widespread community support for your project and letters that show familiarity with the specifics of your project, and letters that describe local resources that will help make the project a success (for example, contribution of in-kind services, funds, or volunteer efforts).